



Photo: Shirley A. Dennis

# Preserving a Patchwork Landscape

The Niagara Escarpment of today is a mix of forests, farms, homes, cottages, quarries, ski hills, golf courses, town sites – a complex patchwork of land shapes, sizes, uses and histories.

## Mapping the Land

European settlers tamed the wild Southern Ontario landscape by laying out lots and concessions - straight lines superimposed on a landscape often rugged, or wet, or broken by shorelines. Slowly with settlement many of the original township lots (100 or 200 acres in size) were carved into smaller, sometimes oddly shaped parcels where new property lines followed rivercourses, or shorelines, or the line of the Escarpment face itself.

From original township lots to subdivided land as settlement grew, the division of the Escarpment land came to a virtual stop in the late 1970s, with the establishment of the Niagara Escarpment Plan. Under the plan, any lot on the Escarpment, whether one acre in size or one hundred, could no longer be subdivided; the aim was to preserve the remaining natural and agricultural Escarpment landscape.

## The Bruce Trail Mobilizes

When Ray Lowes envisioned the Bruce Trail as a way of protecting the Niagara Escarpment, he may not have initially thought that it would be the BTC itself who would be doing the protection. With his inspiration and the help of many other dedicated volunteers, the

need for protection of the Escarpment was indeed made known to the provincial Government, and studies such as the Gertler Report - a comprehensive study of the Niagara Escarpment - and ultimately the Niagara

Escarpment Plan itself were put into action. A chief recommendation of the 1968 Gertler Report was that 36,000 hectares (90,000 acres) of Escarpment land be bought for parkland, at an estimated cost of \$31.5 million. The Province made funds available for Escarpment land acquisition as early as the late 1960s, but by 1972 the province and conservation authorities had purchased only 9,000 hectares at a cost of \$6.6 million; other areas had been acquired by developers.

It was Tom East who spearheaded the BTC's initiative to take an active role in land preservation in the early 1970s, and the BTC acquired its first property in



*Preservation is the act of making land or some other ecosystem legally unavailable to development or exploitation by builders and other individuals.*

**At the BTC, Preservation of the Niagara Escarpment is carried out under our Land Securement Program.**

*Conservation is an active involvement in sustaining, maintaining and improving an ecosystem.*

**At the BTC, Conservation of the Niagara Escarpment is carried out under our Land Stewardship Program.**

1974. The Province was providing a 3 to 1 matching contribution at the time - heady days for land preservation!

## Funding Land Acquisitions

Over the years the BTC continued to acquire land using primarily government funds supplemented by donations from its members. Between 1985 and 1995 the BTC received an average of \$400,000 per year from the Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR); between 1995 and 2005, MNR funding had dwindled to an average of \$200,000 per year. In 2005, Provincial funding programs were further cut back. Without a reliable stream

of funds from the Province for our land acquisitions, we had to turn to our members for help in funding land acquisitions. (this might be neatly demonstrated with a chart and caption)

For many of our members and supporters, acquiring land seemed like a new initiative for the BTC; with government funding being our primary source of revenues for so many years, we had never had to ask for help in such a forthright way. But would they help? Yes indeed! The response was astounding - our members and supporters not only filled the gap left behind by the Province, they went above and beyond. Since 2005, donations from our members and other supporters have averaged an incredible \$1.6 million per year. Between 1974 and 2004 we were responsible for the preservation of 5,169 acres of land worth \$9.4 million at time of sale. In the last 10 years alone, with the extraordinary support of our members, we've been able to preserve an additional 4,468 acres of land worth \$15.6 million.

## The Optimum Route

Lands acquired by the BTC are clustered along the "Optimum Route" (OR) of the Bruce Trail. The OR - like its name suggests - is the place most ideal for the Trail location. The OR was first mapped the mid 1980s. It usually lies near the edge of the Escarpment, either on top or below, but (especially in places where the Escarpment face is obscured) can also follow river valleys, ridges, shorelines and other significant natural features that are found near the Escarpment.

The OR is our "wish list" route. In some places the Bruce Trail follows the



OR; in others we have not been able to gain landowner permission for the Trail or acquire the land ourselves, and must follow another route, often on roadways.

### The BTC's Land Securement Secretariat

Some properties acquired along the OR are bounded on either side by private land where Trail access has not been granted. One such property acquired in 1976 at Old Baldy was an "orphan" along the OR for four decades, before adjacent landowners agreed to allow the main Bruce Trail across their properties and thus allow our Old Baldy property to become part of the main Bruce Trail. So achieving the OR for the Bruce Trail is a long term vision – land acquired today that may not be accessible now, will be an important part of the jig saw puzzle in future years as adjacent land or permission for Trail is acquired. Currently about 51% percent of the OR is secured in public ownership (conservation areas, provincial parks, federal parks, municipal land, BTC-owned land, etc.); the remainder is on private property by permission of the landowner, or on roadways. It is this 49% that the BTC continues to whittle down each year.

The work of reviewing and recommending land for acquisition is carried out by the BTC's Land Securement Secretariat, made up of one volunteer from each Club section, representatives from the Fundraising, Trail Development and Maintenance, and Landowner Relations committees, a representative from the Niagara Escarpment Commission, and staff including the BTC's Director of Land Securement, and GIS Cartographer. This group brings a wide range of expertise to the task: land use planning, mapping, surveying, appraisals, real estate, finance, and knowledge of the landowners and local community.

Properties for potential acquisition come to the LSS by a variety of means. Sometimes it's the Club Landowner Relations, Land Securement or Trail Maintenance volunteers – our eyes and ears in the community - who identify a possible acquisition. Other times the BTC is contacted directly by a landowner or realtor. And sometimes it's our sharp-eyed members who spot a "For Sale" sign near the Trail and report it to the BTC staff – acquisition of the beautiful Crevice Springs property in Woodford



Photo: Michael McDonald

(Sydenham) came to us in just this way!

The LSS meets monthly to review and strategize over prospective acquisitions. When a property is identified as one we wish to pursue, the BTC's Director of Land Securement, with the help of a Club volunteer as appropriate, begins negotiations with the landowner. If the landowner is interested an appraisal is ordered to establish the property's Fair Market Value (FMV). Once the appraisal has established the FMV, BTC staff and the landowner, with approval from the Board of Directors, negotiate a formal donation agreement (if the landowner wishes to donate the land) or "Offer of Purchase and Sale".

In some cases we acquire an entire property but other times we may only want a portion of the property. The Niagara Escarpment Plan permits the BTC to sever properties in order to create a Trail corridor – we carve off the portion we need, and leave the landowner with the buildings or the building lot they wish to keep. When we sever land, the portion we keep for our Trail corridor is not developable – it never can be developed and remains as conservation land in perpetuity.

Acquisitions don't always mean purchase of land. Some generous landowners, such as Pat McNally in Waterdown (2006 donation) and the Richardson family at Pinnacle Rock (2013), donate their land to the BTC. Others chose to donate a portion and sell the rest (called a "split receipt"), such as a group of supportive landowners at Dyer's Bay (2011). Each year we are honoured and humbled by the landowners who step forward to donate some or all of their land for conservation, and entrust us with its care.

Once the agreement for the acquisition is in place, the task then turns to arranging for funding for the property. We do this with targeted appeals to our supporters and outreach to potential donors including corporations and foundations. If the property is a severance, there are also many additional tasks including municipal consent (which takes several months), and a thorough property survey. Understandably, getting firms to survey our lands isn't always easy – we purchase complicated lots often following curvy cliff edges complete with staggering heights and deep crevices – a challenge for any surveyor!

When all the steps are completed, the

final result is another piece of the beautiful Niagara Escarpment preserved forever because of the fine efforts of the BTC, its member Clubs and its many supporters.

### Bringing it All Together

Speaking about the rugged landscape of rocks, waterfalls, forests and recreational opportunity, Ray Lowes said *"The Bruce Trail is the chain that at once binds this potential into a unified whole; that brings the very existence of a unique resource sharply to the attention of a population used to taking things for granted; that, when it is built and being used, will inspire a desire to protect and preserve from further encroachment a green belt across the province which could be our pride in future years."* (Bruce Trail News, September 1963)

Our Niagara Escarpment is a patchwork landscape of properties stitched together at property lines and clustered along the long and indelible thread of the Bruce Trail. The Bruce Trail Conservancy is the only charity working to conserve a conservation corridor for the Bruce Trail. Our efforts now span 50 years. Governments may change policies and legislation, conservation provisions may be tightened or diminished. We believe the best mechanism to ensure the future of the Niagara Escarpment's natural spaces is to preserve and conserve them today, for the future. Many of you, our supporters, hold the same belief. Your support has made the BTC one of Ontario's largest land trusts. Our land acquisition and stewardship work is

effective, unique and of critical importance to anyone who loves nature and all the benefits it bestows upon us. •

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In the Summer 2014 Bruce Trail Magazine we'll cover the work of the BTC and its volunteers in *conserving the land*, focussing on our extensive and dedicated Land Stewardship program.  
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*If you know of property for sale on or near the Bruce Trail, or a landowner who might be willing to sell or donate some land for the Trail, contact the local club's Landowner Relations or Land Securement directors, or Antoin Diamond (BTC Director of Land Securement) at 519-823-7768.*

THE BRUCE TRAIL CONSERVANCY'S DIGITAL PHOTO CONTEST

## 2014 PHOTO CONTEST – ESCARPMENT WATER

**A walk along the Bruce Trail often leads to an encounter with water in one of its many guises. Teal-blue shorelines. Thunderous waterfalls. Delicate streams. Buzzing wetlands. Dew-covered leaves.**

Water along the Niagara Escarpment is beautiful in its nature, varied in its forms, and vital to the health of the ecosystems and human communities that call the Escarpment home. This year, as we celebrate 50 years of preserving and conserving the Niagara Escarpment, our photo contest theme reflects that most vital resource – *Escarpment Water*.

**Search your photo collection for your favourite images depicting *Escarpment Water*** and enter up to three of them in our 2014 Photo Contest. Your photo could be featured on the next issue of Bruce Trail Magazine.

From the entries, 10 finalists will be chosen by a panel of BTC judges. The winning image will be chosen from these ten in an online public vote at [brucetrail.org](http://brucetrail.org).

**The winning image will appear on the front cover of the Summer issue of Bruce Trail Magazine.** The winner will also receive a Bruce Trail gift pack and a plaque-mounted print of their magazine cover. Images from all 10 finalists will be featured inside the Summer 2014 issue.

### HOW TO ENTER

- Visit the BTC website [brucetrail.org](http://brucetrail.org) for full contest details.
- Upload your photo submissions via your Member Login by March 24, 2014.
- Submit up to three (3) photos.

### ELIGIBILITY & ENTRIES

- Contest is open to BTC members only. Voting will be open to all visitors to [brucetrail.org](http://brucetrail.org).
- Photos must be taken on the Bruce Trail or one of its side trails.
- Photos must depict water.
- Fall and Winter images will be disqualified since the winning image will be on the Summer issue of the magazine. (Sorry, no ice or snow shots!)
- Review Contest Rules & Regulations online for complete details.

### VOTE FOR YOUR FAVOURITE PHOTO

Visit [brucetrail.org](http://brucetrail.org) between April 1 and 22, 2014 to vote for your favourite photo among the 10 finalists. Voting is open to all visitors to the BTC website.

For more information and to see the finalists from past years, visit [brucetrail.org/pages/contests](http://brucetrail.org/pages/contests).

**ENTRY DEADLINE:**  
March 24, 2014 (11:59 pm EST)

**VOTING ONLINE:**  
April 1 – 22, 2014

**WINNERS ANNOUNCED:**  
April 23, 2013

